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Two rules of Law

by Will Nicholls

What a time this has been. What started out as a story on a missing Cree woman, Sindy Ruperthouse became much more as allegations of misconduct, sexual and otherwise, came to light when First Nations women in Val-d'Or courageously shared their stories with Radio-Canada's *Enquête* program. A quiet internal investigation of the SQ officers that started earlier this spring blew wide open, triggering intense reactions across Quebec and beyond.

There was shock and outrage among Quebec's First Nations leaders. The Cree leadership was quick to act, cancelling the annual hockey and broomball tournament in Val-d'Or saying they wouldn't hold it in a place that was unsafe for their women. This meant a loss of almost $4 million for the town. Other meetings have been cancelled or moved. A yearly business exchange day was moved to Amos. Cree Nation Government departments were instructed to get supplies and services elsewhere.

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come defended this position by noting Val-d'Or Mayor Pierre Corbeil appeared more concerned over losing revenue for the city economy than about the systemic racism Crees faced there. He had plenty of support. Chiefs from all over Quebec banded together in unity to say enough is enough.

I respect the police. They have difficult jobs as guardians of our society. Yes, the SQ officers in question are entitled to a presumption of innocence until proven guilty. That is the rule of law, but the way the situation has been handled is not in keeping with the responsibility of their positions. As police officers they hold a great deal of authority and power. If they tell you to get into the police car you don't really have a choice. Any potential abuse of that power must be taken seriously and dealt with in a manner that leaves no question in the public mind that all that can be done has been done to ensure public safety.

Rogue cops are a danger not only to the public they serve but also to the integrity and credibility of the entire police force.

That said, I am disappointed the Quebec government is resisting calling a provincial judicial inquiry. It is the only process that has real teeth, the power to subpoena witnesses to testify under oath. Premier Couillard said he is waiting to see if an expected federal inquiry into murdered and missing women covers the same ground. Since the Val-d'Or victims are still alive and not missing, it seems just to be a cop-out.

There are two possible answers for this response. One is to give the Quebec government some time with a hope and prayer that First Nations will once again become the passive voices that they have often been. Another possibility is that the Couillard believes that these alleged crimes are on the same scale as murdered and missing women. One can hope the second is the case, but I have my doubts.

It is obvious that a system must be put into place to oversee the police and their actions. Coon Come has said they are out of control. In some ways we can see his reasoning given how many police officers are actually punished compared to accused civilians. I have seen armed police officers protesting. Imagine what would happen if Native people carried firearms during a demonstration. That would seem to tell us that there are two rules of law in Canada – one for the police and another for the rest of us.

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photo by
Lyle Stewart

Justin in the driver's seat

by Joshua Iserhoff

It's all about gender equality these days, right? Thanks to our 23rd Prime Minister Justin Pierre James Trudeau (How stately are his names? A name like Ty'shawnerell wouldn't work here) for making balancing the workload so none of us could nag of this issue. Great move, Justin!

I've been reading a lot on this guy and I like him. Sure he's got charm, looks, hair, smile, a gorgeous first lady and beautiful children and a super nice Rideau Cottage (when I think of cottage, it's a cabin near a lake and an outhouse), I had to google this Rideau Cottage and it's my type of cottage. It's just beautiful and incredibly PM-like.

Did you guys/girls know that Justin (I refer him by his first name with total respect and honour. I feel that's how he would want me to call him: Justin) is a Christmas baby too, he was born on December 25! Now all of Canada can rejoice in the birth of Jesus and Justin. What are the odds?!

I can honestly say that some people are born into leadership roles. I wonder if I am Parliament material?! I may have to start using Rogaine now. I wish Justin and his beloved wife Sophie and children all the best and prayers whilst leading this great nation of ours. I wonder if our dear Her Majesty The Queen will come and visit the cottage soon.

Unto more politics: The honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, and I had the chance to speak on several occasion over the years discussing First Nations issues and I immediately liked her. She knew her stuff and even thought that she would make a good deputy prime minister. Little did I know since 2006, there has been no deputy – I don't know why but I am guessing Harper will write a memoir and educate us issues such as this one and, or the vision he had for Canada? I, for one, would like to read this memoir. In Lincoln's words: "I don't like that man. I must get to know him better."

In all classiness, I must say thank you to Mr. Harper for his service to the Canadian people. If one thing you can take away from Mr. Harper's tenure is that he made you boil and speak out. Sometimes a leader will come and shake a nation. Native, non-Native, Christian, non-Christian, whatever position we may hold, any party, I believe Mr. Harper brought many issues to our meetings, to our dinner tables, to our rallies. He awoke the sleeping giant! Creator bless Harper, his wife and his children. By the way, Carolyn's got the best sassy glasses in the cabinet. I wish her much success in dealing with us, Indians (the feather not the dot).

Wow, two First Nations people in Justin's cabinet! That's something to celebrate and incredibly honouring to our people. Once again, good move, Justin! Last but not least, high five to Romeo Saganash on his re-election as our Eeyou MP. I am one proud Eeyou. One last thing, I want to wish my wonderful, loving, supportive, praying mother, Annie a Happy Birthday! I love you!

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Fly the healthy skies

The Cree Health Board's medical shuttle takes off

by Jesse Staniforth

The population of Eeyou Istchee is roughly 17,500 – and according to Cree Health Board Director Bella Petawabano, between 7,000 and 8,000 Crees travel every year for healthcare reasons to destinations outside the Cree Nation. For that reason, on October 26, the CHB partnered with Air Creebec to launch a regular Cree Patient Air Shuttle flight from Chisasibi to Val-d'Or and Montreal.

The medical shuttle will bring huge changes for patients travelling for non-emergency reasons, Petawabano underlined. Previously, patients had to ride an Air Creebec scheduled flight, known generally as "the milk run," which is exhausting even for healthy people.

"For people coming from Whapmagoostui, [the scheduled flight] is a long ride and a lot of stops, to Chisasibi, down to Waskaganish, and then to Val-d'Or and Montreal. That's more than several hours on and off the plane," she said.

"Plus, from the plane to the terminal, especially at the Montreal airport, that's a long walk. Depending on how fast you walk, that could be a 10-minute walk to arrivals. If you're not feeling all that great, having to do all that walking is hard. Plus, coming back, having to wake up at 4 in the morning to be picked up by transport and brought to the airport, going through security – that's very difficult for people who've just gone through surgery!"

Jane Sam Cromarty is Chisasibi's interim Local Health Board Director, but, like most people in Eeyou Istchee, she's also cared for a loved one who needed to travel. In her case, her late husband needed to make regular trips to Montreal for dialysis.

"He didn't like that, when he was going down for treatment," Cromarty said. "It was very tiring. I went to escort him, and I had to put him in a wheelchair, and take him through, make sure he had all his papers. You eliminate all that with patients going directly. From that perspective, it's really good for patients, especially when they are sick. Travelling down for treatment is a lot for them already. This is going to be a big change, and a real improvement."

Aboard the maiden flight of the shuttle, Wemindji's Lindy Georgekish had no complaints about the Cree Health Board, but said he'd wait to see what kind of difference the shuttle made to his experience. Still, he acknowledged that his medical travelling had been exhausting.

"Two years ago I was diagnosed with cancer," he said. "When I was doing my chemo treatment, I had to go back home two weeks, come back here and stay a week, then go home again. Back and forth for four months."

Air Creebec Chief Operating Officer Tanya Pash took part in the planning of the flight. Like Cromarty, she's both professionally and personally involved, with loved ones who need to fly south.

"For Elders, it's going to be easier," Pash said. "We have a nurse on board, so if there's any medical issues during the flight they can be addressed."

More personally, Pash said, she has relatives who don't speak English or French but have to travel to Montreal or Quebec City for medical care.

"For me, it's easier knowing they're going to be taken care of," said Pash. "Sometimes I've gone to the airport in Val-d'Or to help them get through security. This alleviates that stress: they're picked up and dropped off at the airport. There's no way they can get lost or displaced – or have those communication issues, because they'll be with other Crees."

Other initiatives the CHB is working on are designed to cut out the need for travel entirely, said Petawabano. She pointed to the development of long-distance telemedicine that allows patients to go to Waskaganish rather than Montreal to have their eyes checked via satellite-examination. It's a big deal for a population with a high rate of diabetes that needs constant access to quality eye-care.

"Imagine what people had to do before!" she said. "A day of travel south, a day to have their eyes checked, and then a day to travel back – that's three days!"

But for those who still have to travel, everyone agreed the shuttle would make life easier.

"When they were talking about it, I was all for it," said Cromarty. "I said, 'Finally there's something for patients.'"

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Commemorating a hero

Monument honouring Shannen Koostachin unveiled in New Liskeard

by Joshua Grant

It's been a long three years in the making, but Jules Koostachin and her creative team have finally realized their goal of constructing a permanent monument to honour the life and legacy of Shannen Koostachin. Shannen's parents, Jenny Nakogee and Andrew Koostachin, were on hand to unveil a beautiful bronze statue of Shannen in traditional regalia October 24 in New Liskeard, Ontario.

Shannen's parents shared an emotional speech with those who attended the ceremony, including former Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence and NDP MP Charlie Angus. Jules said it was "absolutely gorgeous" when she described the consecration of the site as a sacred area to celebrate Shannen's accomplishments before her life was cut short at 15 in a 2010 car accident.

Erected on the waterfront of New Liskeard – where Shannen moved from Attawapiskat to attend high school – the monument is near a children's playground and surrounded by butterfly benches. Shannen was just a child when she launched her national campaign for the "safe and comfy" schools that are lacking in so many First Nations communities. Her legacy lives on through Shannen's Dream, an organization that continues her fight to give First Nations the resources they need to provide education.

Jules says the new memorial site is a safer and more accessible place to honour Shannen's memory. Teachers, students, family members, friends and admirers can gather there to reflect on her struggles on behalf of young Native students.

"It's nice that people have a site to remember her by," she told *the Nation*. "It was really dangerous before, the site on Highway 11. Now there's a site that's safer and more accessible. The monument is really child friendly – it's low to the ground and life size."

Jules said that the weekend was a whirlwind of emotions, but she was "ecstatic" by the end of the unveiling. "It's hard to articulate, but there's a sense of completion, a sense of creating a space that's sacred," she said.

"These are our heroes," related Jules, "and I think it's important that we start honouring our Indigenous heroes. Shannen stood for equitable education and children's rights. I hope that this will be a reminder to non-Indigenous people that many Native children have to leave their communities just to go to school."

Jules Koostachin stands next to a statue of Shannen

Originally from Moosonee, Jules noted that a few people asked her why the monument wasn't erected in a First Nations community. She says New Liskeard was the right location for a number of reasons.

"We chose northern Ontario because it's an important place," Jules explained. "That's where [Shannen] went to school and it's a high-traffic area, a lot of northerners come through here."

Jules Koostachin is an author, filmmaker, activist and mother of two who now lives in BC, where she is working on her PhD. She had her hands full realizing this project with her creative team consisting of sculptor Tyler Fauvelle, designer and cultural consultant

Kenneth Chakasim, and documentary filmmaker Rick Miller.

She and Miller hope to release a 15-minute short film documenting the entire process and will be fundraising to offset production costs.

When asked what impact Shannen's monument could have, Jules said she believes it can be a motivator to bring about change and mobilization to address the various issues faced by First Nations children and communities.

"I hope that it becomes a bit of a social movement, to remind people of the realities of First Nations children and their difficulties accessing education," Jules said. "It's a reminder and a rallying point. It's a reminder to the rest of Canada of Shannen and her work and our ongoing struggle as First Nations. Normally Indigenous issues get bumped or deferred. I'm hopeful, but I want to see some action."

Family and friends gather around Shannen's monument after the unveiling ceremony

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Aboriginals in the Liberal cabinet

After being sworn into office, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau presented his new cabinet on November 4, which includes BC Aboriginal leader Judy Wilson-Raybould as Minister of Justice. Wilson-Raybould Kwakwaka'wakw, a former crown prosecutor and BC Regional Chief for the Assembly of First Nations, will oversee important files directly impacting First Nations communities across the country.

Nunavut MP Hunter Tootoo was named Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. His department will oversee sealing, which is a contentious issue in Nunavut, where Inuit hunters have suffered due to the European Union's ban on seal products.

Though not Native, Toronto MP Carolyn Bennett, who spent several years as the Liberal Aboriginal Affairs critic, has been named the new Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

Trudeau's cabinet represents a wide array of cultures and unique backgrounds, including a Paralympian and an Afghan refugee. Half of the cabinet ministers are women and important adjustments have been made to ministerial titles to reflect the Liberals' ambitious election campaign platform.

Women's shelters being constructed

A ceremonial blessing of the grounds for a new women's shelter was held in Waswanipi November 3.

Following an agreement signed by Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come and Cree Health Board Chairperson Bella Moses Petawabano at the Annual General Assembly, construction of the Waswanipi shelter is underway. Another women's shelter will be constructed in Waskaganish in spring 2016.

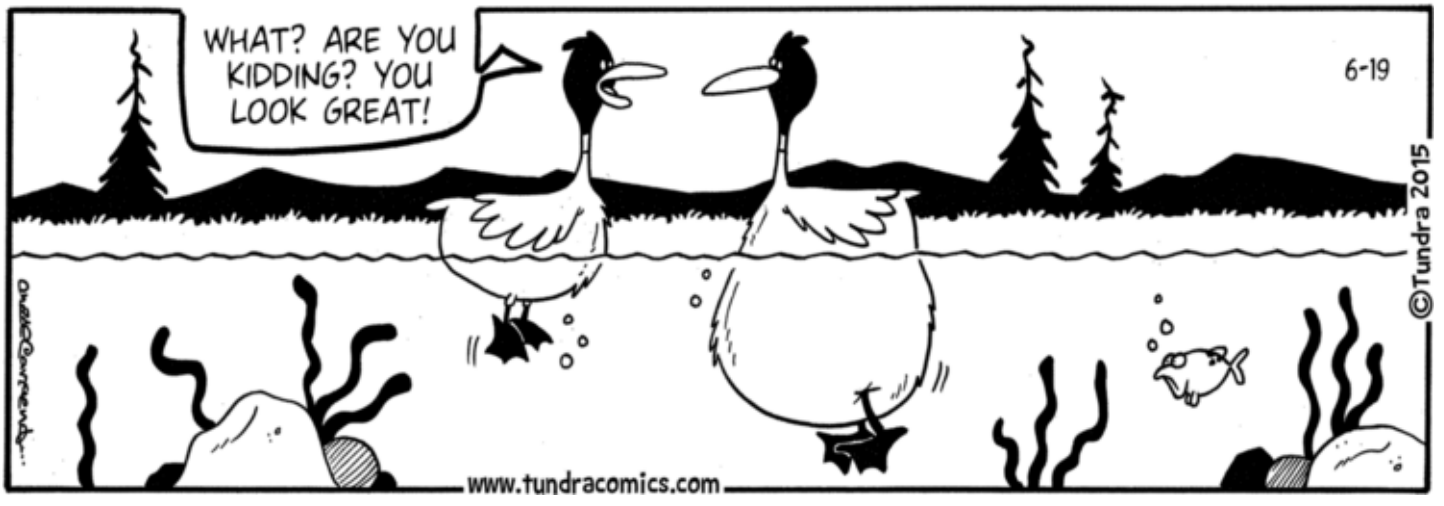
Cree Justice is heading the project and will lease the structures to the Cree Health Board with the Waswanipi shelter servicing the inland communities and Waskaganish supporting the coastal area.

A Cree Health Board press release states that the shelters' mission is to offer Cree women a "safe, respectful, inclusive, accessible and culturally-sensitive environment" and demonstrates a commitment to "encourage and nurture the safety of Cree women, children and the Cree Nation" as a whole.

Fundraising for new scooter successful

Philomene Swallow Rabbitskin, who made headlines a few weeks ago for her wheelchair walk from Mistissini to Chibougamau, has successfully raised the necessary funds to purchase a new scooter.

Swallow told *the Nation* that between the sponsor sheets they created before their walk, donations made since then and, thanks to media attention, they were able to raise over $6000, with donations still coming in. She specifically thanks her friends Kevin and Eileen as well as Simeon and Kathy Mianscum.



Tensions boil over

Val-d'Or allegations throw Quebec into a crisis over relations with Aboriginal communities

by Jesse Staniforth

Twenty five years ago this month, a 17-year-old Cree man named Neil Stonechild was picked up by Saskatoon police, driven out to the edge of the city, and left there. Temperatures were below minus 25°C, and Stonechild's frozen body, wearing a light jacket and one shoe, was later found in a field.

His was one of five deaths between 1990 and 2000 allegedly connected with the Saskatoon Police Service practice of "starlight tours" – picking up Aboriginal people who were drunk and/or disorderly, driving them out of town, and abandoning them in the cold. During a 2003 inquest into the freezing deaths, Saskatoon's police chief admitted that the practice had a history that stretched back into the mid-1970s.

Public reaction to Stonechild's death and revelations about the "starlight tours" led to firings of officers all the way up to the Chief of Police. Yet whisperings about other forms of "starlight tours" have continued in communities a long way from Saskatoon.

In Val-d'Or, Indigenous women on the street had been warning one another for over a decade that the practice was alive and well, but with an ugly twist. As the province learned October 22 during an episode of Radio-Canada's investigative program *Enquête*, a series of poor and homeless Indigenous women from Val-d'Or claim that, at various times over the past decade they were picked up for being drunk by Sûreté du Québec (SQ) officers and driven outside of town. There, they claim, they were in some cases abandoned, beaten or sexually assaulted. Some say they were paid or given alcohol or drugs to perform sex acts with police officers.

One of the women, Bianca Moushoun, told *Enqûete*, "Instead of taking me to the police station, they took me some place else. They'd ask me, 'Do you want some beer?' They had some in their trunk. They'd give me one, then another, then another. And we'd drive into the little roads here, and stop by the side. That's where they'd ask me to give them a blowjob. […] Pretty much every girl who was doing prostitution in Val-d'Or had that happen to them. Above all, Native girls."

Moushoun said that, in all, seven members of the SQ had driven her outside of town and paid her for sex, usually two at a time.

"They'd pay $200, $100 for the service, and $100 to keep me quiet," she said. "Sometimes they paid in coke, sometimes they paid in money. Sometimes it was both."

In May, several women lodged official complaints with the SQ, which tasked its internal affairs department to investigate while the accused officers remained on patrol. Following the airing of the episode of *Enquête*, however, SQ Director General Martin Prud'homme requested the investigation be handed over to Montreal's police force (the SPVM), and suspended eight officers with pay.

(The SPVM would not comment on their ongoing investigation, but they encourage anyone with information relating to the allegations of abuse by SQ officers to call 1-844-615-3118 to speak with investigators.)

The Enquête story provoked a shock among Quebec's political elite. Public Security Minister Lise Thériault, though first informed of the allegations last May 15 in a letter sent by Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre director Edith Cloutier, held an emotional press conference in which she broke down in tears. Thériault brought in Captain Ginette Séguin to replace

"There are accusations of rape – how does a rapist become a scapegoat? There are accusations of assault – how does an assailant become a scapegoat? There are accusations of supplying drugs and alcohol – how does a drug dealer or bootlegger become a scapegoat? Wanting justice is not searching out a scapegoat."

Cree Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come

Captain Jean-Pierre Pelletier as director of the Val-d'Or detachment – and shortly after, announced she would be taking six weeks of stress leave.

On the weekend of October 24-25, the entire staff of the SQ's Val-d'Or detachment called in sick to protest what they claimed was a lack of support from elected leaders. This did not worry SQ Director General Prud'homme, who told a press conference that there was no crisis, and that, "It will take some time to pass through this period. I'm not worried: our police officers will gradually come back to work."

On October 26, the union representing Quebec's 5400 provincial police officers issued a press release arguing the problem resides with First Nations communities, not the SQ. "This crisis arises above all else [from] a societal problem with Native nations, which live in great difficulties on a national scale," said Association des policiers provinciaux du Québec (APPQ) president Pierre Veilleux. "It would be a shame that concerned police officers become the scapegoats for problems that largely exceed their functions."

Veilleux also demanded the Public Security Ministry publicly acknowledge that SQ officers

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"do an excellent job in a sometimes strained and difficult atmosphere in their relations with the Native community."

The Grand Chief's Position

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come was unrestrained in his response to these comments, telling *the Nation* they were "appalling."

"The allegations are about specific abuses committed by specific individuals of the SQ against specific Cree and Algonquin women. There are accusations of rape – how does a rapist become a scapegoat? There are accusations of assault – how does an assailant become a scapegoat? There are accusations of supplying drugs and alcohol – how does a drug dealer or bootlegger become a scapegoat? Wanting justice is not searching out a scapegoat."

The Grand Chief was equally forceful in his response to comments by Premier Philippe Couillard to the Montreal Gazette that the alleged assaults were "a tragic symptom" of the dysfunction caused by the Indian Act, and that the Indian Act must be reformed.

"If it has been proven that SQ officers in the Val-d'Or area took advantage of their authority to abuse Cree and Algonquin women it has nothing to do with the Indian Act," Coon Come said. "The SQ officers are not governed by the Indian Act and there is nothing in the Indian Act that permits SQ officers to violate their professional codes of conduct, their ethical standards, and their basic standards of decency. If poverty and poor living conditions make Aboriginal women vulnerable, then it is precisely

people like SQ officers who should be protecting them from potential abuse, not [becoming] perpetrators of abuse."

Coon Come said he believed Couillard's comments were ultimately an attempt to shift blame.

"It is wrong to make such comments before having stated how we will address the very specific situation before us," he said. "Then and only then can we begin the dialogue on matters like the Indian Act and the legacy of colonization, which leaves one community at the mercy of the other."

A National or Provincial Inquiry?

Couillard also dismissed, for the moment, provincial public inquiry in favour of waiting for the national Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women inquiry that recently sworn-in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had pledged to call. "We will see what the federal government puts in place because we won't have two series of hearings on the same subject running at the same time," Couillard explained.

To Sharon Hunter, Community Relations Advisor for the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre, Couillard is simply buying time.

"For something that's going on in his province and his jurisdiction – to not have a stronger position than that?" she exclaimed. "I'm wondering to what degree he felt like he was caught with his pants down. Edith [Cloutier] wrote letters back in May to the Minister of Public Security, and she also wrote

"They'd pay $200, $100 for the service, and $100 to keep me quiet," she said. "Sometimes they paid in coke, sometimes they paid in money. Sometimes it was both."

Bianca Moushoun

to [Aboriginal Affairs Minister] Geoffrey Kelley. It should have been at their level."

Minister Kelley responded, "Over the summer people from my office spoke with Edith Cloutier on several occasions. Obviously I made sure that my colleague, the Minister of Public Security, got a copy of the letter. But [Aboriginal Affairs] doesn't have a power to investigate. There are very serious allegations in the letter, but between that and what we saw on television… there was a wide gap, and I was quite shocked."

NDP MP Romeo Saganash also wants to see the provincial government call a public inquiry.

"The government of Quebec has a major role to play here," he told *the Nation*. "We left them off the hook for the time being. An independent public inquiry is something that we need to pursue. Having a police corps investigate another police corps is never the solution for the public. There has been public pressure over the years to change that. I went through the Human Rights Watch report on the Highway of Tears, and they're saying the same thing, [as are] Amnesty International."

Grand Chief Coon Come is categorical in this regard.

"There is an urgency to protect and support the victims," he emphasized. "It's also important to conduct a provincial judicial investigation which will allow us to get to the bottom of what happened to women who are the victims of police abuse. We do not want a political process, and we do not want to limit ourselves to the national inquiry that the federal government will implement, which concerns the fate of murdered or missing women. We will pursue the inquiry from here on and are willing to work with Quebec."

Suspension of Activities

The immediate response of Cree leadership was to suspend Cree Nation Government activities and events in Val-d'Or, including the annual hockey and broomball tournament that brings $4 million to the Val-d'Or economy. As well, CNG departments are being told to avoid purchasing materials and

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The immediate response of Cree leadership was to suspend Cree Nation Government activities and events in Val-d'Or, including the annual hockey and broomball tournament that brings $4 million to the Val-d'Or economy. As well, CNG departments are being told to avoid purchasing materials and services (with the exception of professional services) from Val-d'Or businesses.

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Coon Come said the decision was partly motivated by what he felt was a lack of concern for the safety and well-being of Crees in statements by Val-d'Or Mayor Pierre Corbeil. He told *the National* Post October 26 that, "There are people who say straightaway, 'It's about time this came out,' and there are others who say, 'Is it really that big a deal?'"

In the face of a threatened boycott, Corbeil added, "I question the pertinence of punishing a community for the actions of individuals."

The Grand Chief said this attitude added force to the boycott – which was, he underlined, decided by consensus among Cree leaders and announced to Corbeil privately.

"The mayor of Val-d'Or's first instinct, after the allegations came to light, was to show concern for the image of the town and the potential economic impacts of the allegations on the town's revenues," said Coon Come. "I found this abhorrent. We can only assume that this is indicative of a perception of Crees and Algonquins in Val-d'Or that views us primarily as potential sources of revenue. If the mayor cannot stand with us in support of our women in this horrifying situation, then perhaps his town should not benefit from our commercial activities until such time as he has a change of heart and decides to do the right thing."

Coon Come said the motivation of all parties should be concern for the well-being of Indigenous women, particularly those who braved possible reprisals by making these allegations public.

"Until such a time that serious efforts and initiatives have been put in place to make a shift in attitudes toward our Cree and Algonquin people living in the Val-d'Or area, so that people do not feel vulnerable and fearful, we will withhold our institutional activities scheduled to take place in Val-d'Or – and until we feel that we are valued, not just for our ability to bring commercial revenues to Val-d'Or. We need to send a strong message that our presence in Val-d'Or should never be taken for granted and that there needs to be a fundamental shift in how we are viewed and how we are treated."

Reiterating a memo sent to Cree entities, Coon Come said that there was no blanket boycott of Val-d'Or businesses, and that individual Crees were free to go and shop where they pleased.

But Coon Come argued that any attempts at a municipal level

to downplay the seriousness of the situation in Val-d'Or essentially gave the impression that nothing was wrong. "How are we are going to even begin to address the issue of racism if the leadership can't admit it exists?" He stated. "Radical action needed to be taken to get the leadership of Val-d'Or to wake up and admit the real problem. It is only by naming it and facing it that we can then attack it."

The Impact in Val-d'Or

Romeo Saganash understands the reasoning behind such thinking, but because his constituents are also those affected by the withdrawal of CNG business, he is divided.

"The city of Val-d'Or has absolutely no role with the SQ," Saganash said. "That's the government of Quebec's responsibility. Val-d'Or cannot do anything with the SQ, and people seem to forget that."

Robert Larivière, CEO of the Forestel Hotel in Val-d'Or, said he initially viewed the story as non-political. "They're talking about allegations about the SQ. We, in the commercial community, on the other hand, we just do business," he said.

Larivière worried that a boycott would affect relations between Crees and Val-d'Or businesses in the long run. "The boycott will cost the whole population, but the communi-

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"As a Native person and a Native woman," she said, "I feel the stares and contempt."

Sharon Hunter,
Community Relations Advisor
for the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre

ties as well, it will cost. Are they going to come back here to spend their money? When it's been years they've been coming to the same place, the order to not come back to Val-d'Or – I don't understand that."

Larivière said he visited the Friendship Centre to educate himself after the allegations became public. He now believes non-Native people have a lot to learn about the situation by listening and building bridges with their Native neighbours.

"That's why it's important to get all of these people around a table to discuss the issue, to talk about the realities from one to another and to better grasp how to arrive at solutions," Larivière said. "I hope that politicians and First Nations can really understand the challenges of this situation. We understand it's that the acts that were reported to *Enquête* that are in question – it's much bigger than that. It's in our best interests to listen."

Saganash says he is satisfied that Mayor Corbeil has expressed support for the alleged victims. But he does not yet believe that support is shared widely among some elements of the Val-d'Or business community.

"The Chamber of Commerce has been complaining about the economic impact of any boycott by Crees," said Saganash, "But besides wanting our money, what is the Chamber of Commerce offering in return? Are they offering sessions with their members, to educate them about Aboriginal rights and the Cree and Aboriginal economic impact in Val-d'Or? No. Are they offering to teach basic Cree to their members, so that

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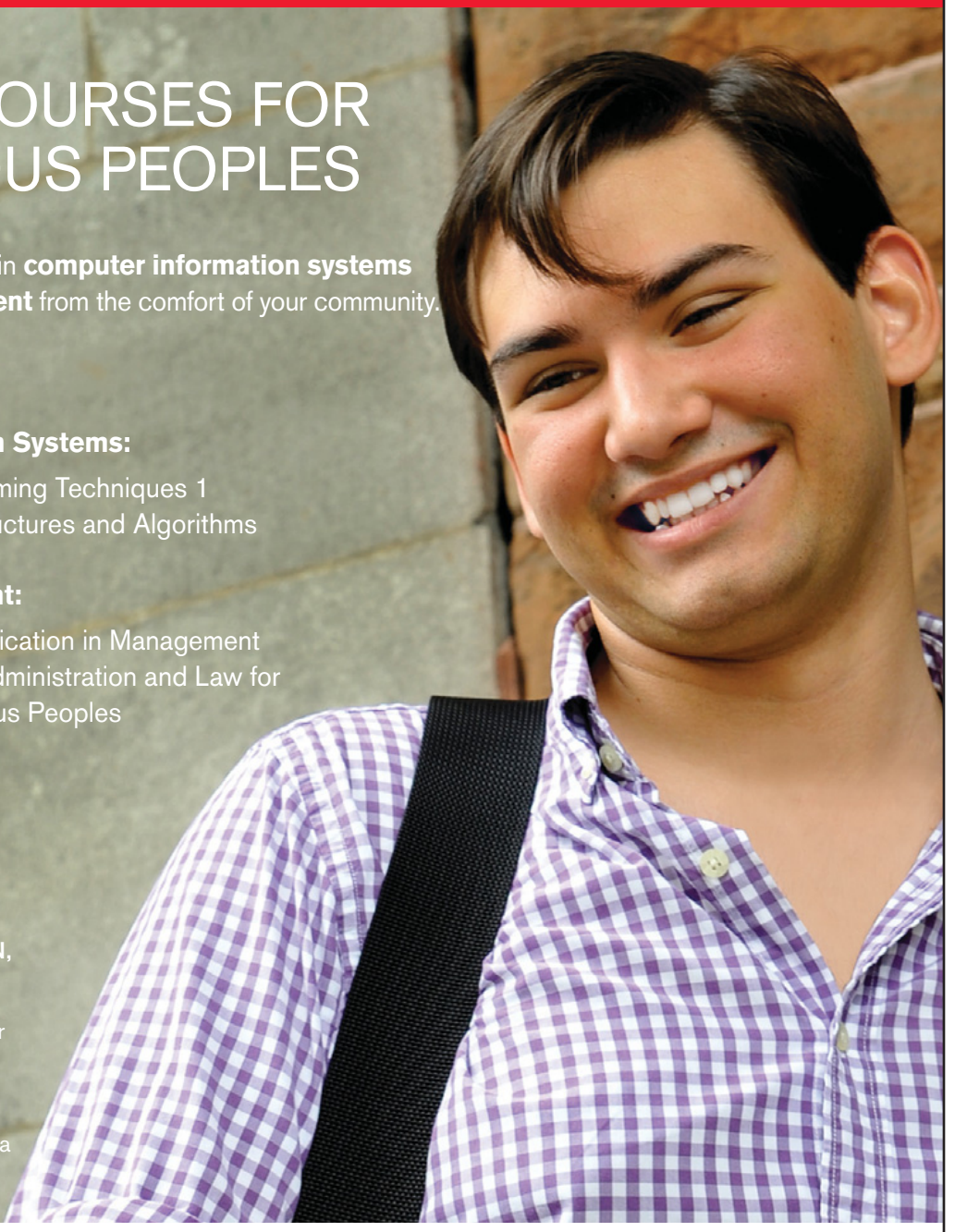

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they can welcome Crees and Algonquins in their shops?"

Such concrete steps, Saganash said, can build lasting respect while also contributing to cross-cultural understanding.

The Widening Rift

Some say that relations between the communities in Val-d'Or are now more strained than ever. Despite that, Sharon Hunter says that there have always been many residents who support Native causes and concerns.

"As a Native person and a Native woman," she said, "I feel the stares and contempt. There are people who, as soon as you're in a restaurant, start to whisper. I think the racists are a minority, but a very loud one. There's always that percentage that feels invaded by the Native presence in Val-d'Or. I'm curious to know to what degree they feel even more convinced of their racism because these allegations are from Native women, who are vulnerable and live in poverty, who live with addictions and probably prostitution. The degree of their credibility diminishes with each layer of social condemnation."

Grand Chief Coon Come also said there were many Valdoriens who "shared our shock and horror at the allegations and who stand with us in demanding an investigation into the truth." However, he expressed concern about public petitions supporting the SQ in advance of any investigation.

"This to me means that some people in Val-d'Or have already made up their minds to disregard, discredit or blame the victims," he said. "This is unfortunate and these people give the entire town a bad name. Such petitions say that Indigenous lives do not matter nearly as much as the reputations of possible perpetrators."

Laurent Arel, the SQ union's public relations director, emphasized that the eight officers subject to complaints are currently being investigated for abuse of power and assault, not for sexual misconduct. (Of the official complaints received so far, the two accusations of sexual assault concerned an officer who has since died.)

Hearing this, Hunter noted, "That's the difference between accusations and complaints. There are accusations, but then there's complaints that are in the process of being [investigated] and may eventually lead to charges. We're at the initial stage."

Salomé McKenzie, Chief of Lac Simon

In the *Enquête* story, SQ spokesperson Martine Asselin acknowledged that though they were investigating the allegations of sexual assault, they had not received any formal complaints alleging demands of sexual favours, or complaints by women of being taken outside of town and abandoned.

But for Hunter, this situation goes deeper than the recent allegations. She says discussion at the Friendship Centre has now turned to the issue of institutionalized racism, and how racist ideas are reproduced in the structure of organizations like police forces and other government bodies.

This was an idea forcefully given voice by Kahnawake Grand Chief Joe Norton, who participated in the October 27 gathering of 40-some AFNQL Chiefs and delegates in Val-d'Or.

Norton told a press conference that institutionalized racism causes these situations. "The racism that says you can do what you damn well please to Native people and you can get away with it," he said. "The government itself and the police union will allow you to get away with it, regardless of how blatant the issues are. There's very little that shocks me, but this has. If it can happen here, it can happen anywhere. In my discussions with First Nations leaders across Canada, it has become abundantly clear that it is happening all over the place."

The Situation on the Ground

Many of the women involved in the *Enquête* story were familiar to the executive director of La Piaule, Val-d'Or's homeless shelter. Stéphane Grenier said that outsiders might not understand the volatility of the situation.

"The majority of the allegations were about policemen taking people out of town because they were too drunk and they had no place to put them," he said. Grenier acknowledged that a lack of a day-centre for homeless people meant more people drinking in the streets, especially during cold periods. But, "Police of Val-d'Or are under pressure. If somebody is drunk and in the street, they can't let them be on the street, or in stores, or in the doorways of stores, and they can't bring them to the park."

In the absence of a regular day-centre, Grenier said, their only option is to take intoxicated homeless people to jail.

"One of the policemen who has been suspended told me a few months ago that day after day he had to put a completely drunk Aboriginal in a cell, seven days a week," Grenier told *the Nation*. "He was saying it was very hard to do that. He had the impression he worked for nothing. He said, 'Day after day, they're shouting at me that I'm a bad person, I'm disrespectful. But I have to do my job.'"

Nonetheless, Grenier said that it's absolutely unacceptable for police to drive homeless people out of town and leave them there. "They should bring them here to the shelter, or put them in a cell. Even if they have to do the same thing every day with the same person, they should still do that!"

He blames the chronic underfunding of homeless initiatives for making the situation worse. Willie's Place, the homeless day-centre operated by the Friendship Centre, is now open in the morn-

ing while it finishes renovations to its new site. Grenier says La Piaule can only afford to be open from 10 pm to 8 am. When those who have spent the night at La Piaule leave the shelter in the morning, Grenier said, they begin to drink.

"By 12 o'clock most are already drunk," he explained. "We accept them to eat at lunchtime if they are not too drunk. We give them some food. But after that, they continue to drink in the afternoon, and they become a problem for people in the street. They're too drunk. When they come back to the shelter at 10 pm, we often have to wash their clothes because they have urine or vomit on them."

Grenier, a professor of Social Work at Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, says studies show that daytime drop-in centres lower drinking and drug use among homeless communities.

"They can leave the shelter and drink a beer, but they're more likely to stop there and have a coffee or something to eat," he said. "In the afternoon, they'll come to La Piaule and be less drunk. They'll cause less trouble to the population, and they'll drink less if we can intervene."

Ideally, said Grenier, funding would be available to open the night shelter earlier, at 7 pm rather than 10 pm. At the moment, however funding is decreasing in the Couillard government's austerity campaign. A full-time social worker is now only working three days a week.

"Three days a week is not enough for us! She's the only one working with homeless people – but she has three bosses! It seems like they have more bosses and directors in this big organization than they had before!"

Moving Forward

As *the Nation* went to press, the AFNQL was finishing its meeting with Premier Couillard. Speaking after that meeting, Aboriginal Affairs Minister Geoffrey Kelley told *the Nation* that, for now, he felt that it was best to pursue a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women.

A national inquiry "obviously will take us into some examination of how the police handle these cases," said Kelley. "What the premier said to the various chiefs today was, 'Is it possible the federal government could include in its mandate some question about how we could improve relations between various police forces and FN communities?'"

Kelley said Couillard didn't rule out a Quebec-based public inquiry, but that he wants to work first with the federal government on the mandate for a national inquiry.

"Then we'll look at it," said Kelley. "In the meantime we want to set up a form of a task force that will have First Nations participation, the key government ministries involved – Justice, Public Security, Native Affairs of course, and perhaps Social Services – to prepare the way for a high-level political meeting on this question."

For his part, Saganash looks to history for a useful lesson.

"One of the things I've suggested is that Quebec should revisit the 1985 National Assembly resolution recognizing Aboriginal people as nations," Saganash explained.

He noted that in signing the Paix des Braves with the Crees, Quebec was able to put to rest nearly three decades of hostility. That example might be a road map for better relationships with other Indigenous communities as well.

"We have agreements and so do the Inuit, but what do we do with the other Nations?" Saganash said. "We're still developing resource development on the traditional lands of the Innu, of the Atikamekw, of the Algonquin. What are we doing about that? What can we learn from the experiences of the last 30 years?"

Facing the frenzy

Quebec chiefs sit down with Premier Couillard to map a response to the Val-d'Or crisis

Story and photos by Lyle Stewart

The media frenzy surrounding Premier Philippe Couillard's meeting and press conference with several chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL) in Montreal November 4 spoke volumes about the urgency – and opportunity – to repair relations between First Nations and the provincial police in the wake of the crisis in Val-d'Or.

The AFNQL – and, in particular, Cree Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come – were keenly disappointed Couillard rejected, for the moment, a provincial judicial inquiry into allegations of abuse and exploitation by Sûreté du Québec (SQ) officers against marginalized Aboriginal women in Val-d'Or. As well, there was grumbling over the way an independent observer – Université Laval Professor Fannie Lafontaine, a former human rights officer with the UN High Commission for Human Rights – was appointed to oversee the Montreal police investigation of eight Val-d'Or police officers.

Nonetheless, the chiefs acknowledged several small but concrete gestures and Couillard's apparent sincerity in wanting to resolve the crisis of confidence in Quebec's security forces.

"We will always denounce injustice, from whomever it comes," Couillard told a room packed with reporters. "If someone has something to say, she can feel safe to say what she needs to say. Our objective is to protect the women who have come forward and who may be coming forward."

Couillard announced $6.1 million in funding for more social workers, housing for the homeless and expanded programs at the Val-d'Or Native Friendship Centre. It's not a large sum, but at a time the Couillard government is cutting back on core services across the board and provoking protests and strikes throughout Quebec, some chiefs welcomed the news.

"I'm happy about the meeting, Mr. Couillard really wants to give us a helping hand," said Adrienne Anichinapéo, Chief of the Council of the Anicinapek of Kitcisakik. Noting that her small, unrecognized Algonquin community of 350 people lacks even electricity and running water, she said living conditions must be addressed so that vulnerable women will be less likely to leave for the questionable comforts of Val-d'Or or elsewhere.

"What we want are concrete things to improve the situation, and that justice be delivered for First Nations women," Anichinapéo insisted. "We certainly don't want a report that will be left on the shelf."

Likewise, the meeting was encouraging for Lac Simon Chief Salomé McKenzie, whose community, only a half-hour east of Val-d'Or, felt the biggest impact of the explosive revelations in Radio-Canada's *Enquête* program.

"It hasn't been easy for us since the *Enquête* report," said McKenzie. "It's only the beginning and we thank the premier for his openness. But first, we need security for these women. We need to tell them we won't forget you. We are standing with you."

AFNQL Chief Ghislain Picard suggested that more cases of abuse might soon be made public. "We must keep in mind the atmosphere that victims are looking at now," he warned, however. "We must create a climate of confidence. The reality today is that women who appeared on the Enquête episode are being made to feel guilty that they came forward to tell their story. This must change."

Picard also denounced deeply ingrained prejudices against Aboriginals in Quebec's provincial police force. "There seems to be, inside the SQ, a culture that expresses itself differently when it comes to our people, a system of racial profiling," he said.

Grand Chief Coon Come did not mince words in this regard. "We need to address racism and discrimination," he bluntly told reporters. "I'm willing to look for solutions and work with municipalities, but it will not work if you cannot admit there is racism. It will not

Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, Lac Simon Chief Salomé McKenzie and AFNQL Chief Ghislain Picard

work if you try to save face. We have to start. And not just in Val-d'Or."

This is why Coon Come was the chief proponent of an independent judicial inquiry into the Val-d'Or allegations and the way police forces deal with Aboriginal communities in Quebec. In an interview, he said he welcomed Couillard's initiatives and the criminal investigation.

"We need to send a message to women that we are behind you, we believe you and that we're going to put pressure on the government to ensure that there's an investigation," he said. "At the same time we want it to be independent and that's why we asked for an observer. We did suggest the name of Fannie Lafontaine, as well as others. But we left it up to Quebec to make the final decision."

But Coon Come does not accept Couillard's reluctance to call an inquiry. The premier told the press conference that he does not want to step on the toes of newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who he expects will soon call a national inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

"We'll wait for the mandate of the federal commission," said Couillard. "Then we will start meeting and decide what the possible mandate of a provincial inquiry could be, so that we can be ready."

Coon Come argued that approach wouldn't help with the current situation in Quebec.

"The call for a national inquiry only deals with missing and murdered women – it does not deal with living women who personally have stories about how they were physically and sexually abused by SQ officers," he insisted. "That's why we are pushing for a provincial judicial inquiry that is provided for under the Act governing commissions of public inquiry. That's why I was disappointed. I understand the difficulty because everyone wants to know the mandate of a national inquiry. But we want to deal with issues right away."

Coon Come emphasized that only a judicial inquiry has the power to subpoena witnesses to testify under oath. Anything less wouldn't be sufficient.

"We're talking about a police force that's out of control," he told *the Nation*. "A police force that provides alcohol to women, doing starlight tours, providing cocaine, asking for sexual favours. And now they're doing their own petition? They're totally out of control.

"They're already employees of the government of Quebec. I know they have a powerful union. But I certainly think everyone would agree, we need to address the police issues here. We need to improve the relations that are rapidly deteriorating between First Nations and the SQ."

Premier Philippe Couillard

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Speaking out

Montreal vigil for Val-d'Or women celebrates their courage

by Joel Barde

Assembly of First Nations Quebec Regional Chief, Ghislain Picard, speaking to audience

Mohawk activist and artist Ellen Gabriel and event organizer Melissa Mollen Dupuis

Hundreds gathered at Montreal's Place des Arts October 29 to show their support for the women of Val-d'Or and call for an end to violence against Indigenous women.

Participants, both Native and non-Native, held large signs with the youthful faces of missing Aboriginal women.

A Mohawk prayer was followed by a performance by the Buffalo Spring Drummers to start the vigil. Some in the audience carried gas-powered flames and battery-powered lights to represent candles during the cool autumn evening.

The mood was sombre and contemplative, as the audience reflected on the allegations made by 12 Val-d'Or women against Sûreté du Québec (SQ) officers. The women allege a pattern dating back at least 10 years in which SQ officers would pick up intoxicated Aboriginal women and drive them out of the city, before forcing them to walk home in the cold.

Some also allege they were physically assaulted or made to perform sexual acts.

These allegations have prompted many other Aboriginal people, men and women alike, to speak out against racism and police violence and mistreatment.

The contemplative mood soon changed to one of outrage and determination once a powerful mix of First Nations activists and leaders gave passionate and eloquent speeches calling on the federal and provincial governments to improve the safety of Aboriginal women.

"Let's be clear, there is an emergency situation in front of us," said Ghislain Picard, the Assembly of First Nations regional chief for Quebec and Labrador.

Mohawk activist and artist Ellen Gabriel called into question the official investigation into the women's allegations, which will be carried out by Montreal police.

Dear friends,

I wish to thank, with all my gratitude, those who have worked on my campaign. Whether it was in the electoral office or at a distance, you all contributed in so many ways. I appreciate and value each of you and I want to thank each and every person in Abitibi-Baie James-Nunavik-Eeyou who voted. I promise again that I will be here for all residents to listen and work on your behalf to create a society true to our values and a place that we are proud to call home.

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Romeo Saganash

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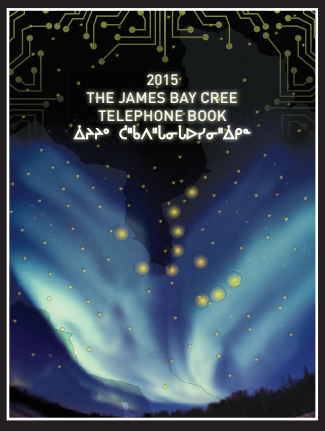

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"We should not accept any inquiry led by government," said Gabriel. "It should be truly independent, led by Indigenous women and their families in order for us to have justice."

Event organizer Melissa Mollen Dupuis said her activism is motivated by a desire to make life better and safer for her newly born daughter. She noted how, as an Aboriginal person, her daughter is significantly more likely to face violence than non-Indigenous Canadians.

"I don't want my daughter to end up on a poster of missing and murdered Indigenous women," she said. "I want her to have a real life, to have access to everything good Canadian society has good to offer."

Following the event, participants told *the Nation* that they felt that the seriousness of the allegations and deeper, systemic issues facing Aboriginal people are beginning to resonate with Quebecers.

Mollen Dupuis noted that she had just appeared on the influential and popular Radio-Canada program, *Tout le monde en parle*.

"It is now in people's kitchens and living rooms, and they are talking about it. People are telling me, 'Listen, I'm in the métro and I hear people talking about missing and murdered Indigenous women,'" she said.

Rhonda Oblin Cooper, a Cree from Waswanipi, was impressed and heartened by the turnout for the vigil, which was organized on relatively short notice. Cooper was in Val-d'Or for her daughter's broomball tournament when the story broke on the Radio-Canada program, *Enquête*. Outraged by what she heard, Cooper jumped into action.

"As the story was breaking, I just felt how could we act like nothing is happening. The story then got bigger and bigger. And the allegations are very alarming. I just felt as parents we had to do something," said Cooper.

Cooper is hopeful the attention the allegations are receiving will translate into better lives for Aboriginals. And she praised the courage of the women who came forward.

"These women opened up the door. The door had been closed. And we'd been knocking. But we hadn't been able to get through. These women opened up the door for issues facing Aboriginal women and everything else that needs to come out."

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Redesigning Cree education

Cree School Board looks for innovative ways to tackle low graduation rates

by Joel Barde

The Cree School Board regional education symposium kicked off two days after the federal election on Oct 21-22. And the symposium's special guest – former Prime Minister Paul Martin – lamented the lack of attention for Aboriginal issues during the long campaign, noting that not one question in five campaign debates addressed First Nations.

That, said Martin, is nothing new. Aboriginal issues have always gotten short shrift in Ottawa.

"I was 50 and a Member of Parliament before I first learned about residential schools," Martin told a packed Montreal conference room filled with Cree and non-Indigenous teachers and administrators.

"How could that happen in this country?" he asked rhetorically.

Since retiring from politics, Martin has dedicated his charitable work to closing the educational achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

The Cree School Board (CSB) is teaming up with the foundation he set up, the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, which will be offering a course in Mistissini this year before expanding to other communities. It teaches Aboriginal entrepreneurship by developing financial literacy and communication skills, Martin explained. The course highlights successful Aboriginal business

people, and students finish with a real-world business plan.

During his speech, Martin said he was excited to begin working with the Cree and hopes the relationship will grow.

Martin praised the teachers and administrators in the room, calling the CSB a "preeminent school board."

It was high praise for a school board that reported a 33% graduation rate in 2013-14. But over the two-day conference, numerous administrators, teachers and workshop leaders expressed confidence that the CSB is on track to significantly improve success rates.

The CSB goal is to increase the graduation rate to 50% by 2020. To get there, the CSB is turning to progressive education approaches that draw on cutting-edge neuroscience.

Changing the Act

One workshop at the symposium described how the CSB is currently revisiting the 1978 Cree School Board Act with the intention of revising it to better reflect Cree values.

Revising the Act is a priority for Abraham Jolly, the Director General of the Cree School Board.

A residential school survivor, Jolly experienced the system explicitly designed by the Canadian government to "take the Indian" out of the child, where abuse and neglect was rampant.

Jolly believes a revised Cree Educational Act – one with a "Cree essence," as he put it – would be an important statement of self-determination.

"Even after the residential schools, in some ways we have been subjected to how the government wants us to run our schools. We need to show that we are a people who can govern ourselves," said Jolly.

Jolly stresses that any new legislation would have to be formally adopted by Quebec's National Assembly. The working group has been at the task for two years, and Jolly said he expects a framework to be ready by next June.

"Even after the residential schools, in some ways we have been subjected to how the government wants us to run our schools. We need to show that we are a people who can govern ourselves."

"It is going to require our Cree leadership and Grand Council to ensure the Act that we want to see is passed by the Assembly," said Jolly.

New approaches

The theme of the symposium was "Inspired Teaching and Valued Learning," and many of the workshops exposed teachers to progressive pedagogical approaches. They ranged from how to integrate technology in the classroom, to the importance of "brain breaks" when teaching.

It's the kind of thinking one might expect to find in the upscale tech-oriented suburbs of California's Silicon Valley. Yet it is being embraced here, in Eeyou Istchee.

Dr. Alex Thornton ran a workshop on the effects of physical education on health and performance. Physical education, he stressed, is as critical

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The contest runs from October 2, 2015, through December 3, 2015, and is open to members of the Cree nation living in one of the Native communities of Eeyou Istchee who are at least 18 years of age. Limit of one entry per person per day. The winner will be announced at 8:00 a.m. on December 9, 2015, during the Hydlo and Friends radio show on JBCCS.

subject for students, one that can have a major impact on students' health and performance.

The problem, Thorton said, is that most schools think about PE in the wrong way. The majority of classes operate on a "sports model", where students play sports and the best athletes tend to participate the most. They get all of the benefits while others sit on the sidelines and do not get their heart rate up.

Thornton advocated for a "fitness mode", which embraces things like circuit training. A fitness model, he said, makes sure all students benefit from the activities. He noted that the Cree are traditionally an extremely athletic people. And he suggested how traditional practices, like long snowshoe hikes in the winter, make for ideal workouts.

"When you think about it, in Cree culture, gym was simply a part of life for young people," said Thornton.

Thornton said students who receive consistent and smart PE classes perform better in school and are happier. Citing numerous peer-reviewed studies, he noted that engaging in exercise can place people into a "hyper-aroused" state, in which students are "able to learn anything." He then suggested schools consider organizing their schedule so challenging courses – like Math – fall directly after PE.

In an interview following the conference CSB Deputy Director Serge Bélivea explained how the CSB wants to be a leader in terms of embracing science-based approaches to education.

"Neuroscience in education is just beginning and is promising. And we're lucky to be part of the early stages in how neuroscience can impact the world of education," he explained. "We want to be leaders in using this knowledge."

Pilot Program in Waswanipi

Bélivea revealed to *the Nation* that Thornton has been hired to work with the elementary and high school in Waswanipi.

Thornton travelled to the community following the conference to work with the school's PE teachers and administrators and redesign the school's approach to Physical Education.

The schools, according to Bélivea, will undergo some major changes. Some classrooms will be equipped with standing desks and work-out stations, where students can get their heart rate up while following a lesson. And schedules will be tailored so challenging subjects follow PE.

Paul Martin addresses CSB Conference

And finally, results will be tracked. A group of students will be equipped with heart-rate and sleep monitors. "We are trying to better understand the role that sleep, nutrition and physical activity has on students," explained Bélivea.

There are, of course, many other fundamental issues that need to be addressed in order to improve educational outcomes. One is absenteeism, which ranges between 20% and 40% in CSB schools. Bélivea noted that this year the CSB worked with hockey tournament organizers to better coordinate between the school year and hockey games, which have historically been a significant contributor to absenteeism.

Bélivea also said that some CSB programs like Success For All, a reading program tailored at the individual level for young students, is showing signs of success and may be expanded to other schools.

"It's not a simple issue. It's about motivation and learning. It's about students knowing what's at the end of this for them. We want to give them hope, to know their learning is meaningful and concrete," he said.

Highlighting future opportunities

Mistissini hosts the CHRD's annual career fair

Story by Joshua Grant Photos by Brendan Forward

Kawana Moar visits Marco Houde at the Canadian Armed Forces booth. The Canadian Armed Forces have attended the event for over four years promoting opportunities for employment and training to Cree youth.

Cree Human Resource Development's annual career fair continues to grow every year. The event's 8th edition saw new exhibitors, increased attendance, its first-ever live online stream and an evening gala featuring some of the James Bay's finest artists.

Taking place at the Neoskweskau Sports Complex in Mistissini October 21-22, the event brought together more than 30 exhibitors representing educational institutions and prospective employers from throughout the James Bay Region along with a number of inspirational guest speakers, role models and entertainers.

Crowd looks on at the Stornoway Diamond Corporation Display. Stornoway was on hand representing the Renard Diamond Mine Project.

Mary Shecapio weaving a snowshoe as part of the traditional showcase.

Day one focused on education, showcasing colleges and universities from Quebec and Ontario and highlighting the various education opportunities, resources and academic support available to youth in Eeyou Istchee. Speakers, panel discussions and workshops stressed the importance of staying in school, clearly defining academic goals and and planning for the future.

Day two was geared towards employment that included a contingent of familiar mining companies such as Stornoway and Goldcorp as well as newcomer

Nemaska Lithium. The 30 plus exhibitors represented companies currently seeking employees. Others began the hiring process for future positions in regional business endeavours that are still in planning and development.

The Cree Youth Council coordinator Deanna Mianscum said the turnout was quite good. More than 400 people registered for the career fair over the course of the two days.

"This year was kind of a challenge because the Cree School Board had their PED days [the same week]," said Mianscum. "The Cree Nation Youth Council covered all of the transportation costs and picked up youth from Washaw Sibi, Waswanipi, Oujé-Bougoumou and Nemaska, they really helped us a lot."

Mianscum told *the Nation* the career fair hosted a number of special guests and offered a wide range of activities for those who attended, including workshops, panel discussions, the evening gala on Day one and a talent show organized by the Cree Nation Youth Council on Day two.

"We also had workshops on career counselling, planning for post-secondary studies, a Commission de la construction du Quebéc session, roundtable discussions and a resumé workshop, developing all of the tools people need to go out and get a job or go out and pursue their studies," related Mianscum.

Notable guests at this year's event included Cree Nation Government Director of Commerce and Industry Andy Baribeau, filmmaker Allison Coon-Come, celebrated Cree artist Mariame Hasni and Elder Robert Kanatewat.

On the lighter side, Mianscum said that the evening activities were a good time for everyone who was involved.

"We did a gala for entertainment, we had Mariame Hasni perform and the kids loved her. After her were the Fort George Rockers and they rocked the house for the older crowd. The food was awesome too! We had catered lunches and a supper provided by local caterers."

Mianscum told *the Nation* the mission of the CHRD career fair is to raise awareness of the education and job opportunities available to the people of Eeyou Istchee. Most importantly the career fair organizers want to share knowledge and instill hope, something she feels they were able to accomplish.

"I was very happy with the turnout and the knowledge people gained," she said. "The people who attended were interested and optimistic, it was great to see."

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Mariame Hasni performing at the gala.

Blazo Voyageur and local artisan Laurie Longchap participating in the traditional showcase.

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Mistissini youth lauded for anti-uranium campaign

Activists win a Nuclear-Free Future Award

by Jeremy East

Youth from the Cree Nation of Mistissini were recognized at the Nuclear-Free Future Awards last month in Washington, D.C. for their successful stand against uranium development in Eeyou Istchee. Shawn Iserhoff, Justice Debassige, Amy Linton and Kayleigh Spencer made the trip to the US capital to accept the award.

"It was a privilege to receive this recognition for the Crees of Mistissini," said Debassige. "We were all ecstatic when we found out we were going to Washington to receive an award. At the ceremony we were just in disbelief and astonished that everything we'd worked on to protect our home from uranium has gotten this far."

Debassige said he first got involved with the anti-uranium campaign in his community four years ago, while completing his final year of high school. A permanent moratorium was placed on uranium development in Quebec earlier this year, and nuclear-free advocacy groups have taken notice of the Cree influence on that decision.

Iserhoff, Debassige, Linton, Spencer and the youth of Mistissini were instrumental in a creating groundswell for 2012's "Together Against Uranium" rally. In 2014, a group from Mistissini marched 850 km from the community to Montreal to deliver their testimony to the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE). The BAPE eventually recommended that the province uphold a ban on uranium development.

"I could not be more proud of the youth of Mistissini, and I congratulate them wholeheartedly on their achievements and on receiving this important recognition today," said Mistissini Chief Richard Shecapio in a press release. "Uranium development in Eeyou Istchee threatens the environment, the wildlife and our future generations. It threatens our traditional practices and the Cree way of life. By their actions, the youth of our community have demonstrated the importance they attach to preserving our territory and Cree values."

The group had the opportunity to meet with several diplomats and activists in Washington. Following the awards ceremony, they were invited to the Austrian embassy for dinner with the ambassador. Debassige said the incredible experience put the importance of the Crees' battle against uranium development into perspective.

"I believe that the people should still keep a close watch on what happens on the land because it's sacred," said Debassige. "It's something that we hold

onto as Cree people. No matter how many victories we achieve, how many companies come in and propose on a project, we have to stand tall and be ready to protect the land for future generations. The people should stay vigilant and stay active."

Above all, Debassige believes it will be up to the youth of future generations to pick up the fight against uranium where others left off.

"Don't be afraid. It gets scary at first, but once you let your peers and community members know that you want your voice to be heard, you ensure that your voice is heard and that you're doing this for the right reasons. A lot of people will say thank you, a lot of people will try to knock you down or step on you, but it's a worthwhile fight."

The group that attended the ceremony wishes to thank the Cree Nation of Mistissini for helping with travel expenses as well as Air Creebec for making it possible for family to attend the awards.

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la Convention de la Baie James et du Nord québécois
Comité d'examen des répercussions sur l'environnement et le milieu social
Environmental and Social Impact Review Committee

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COMEX announces a public hearing on the construction project for a forest road in Sections H West and I, which involves building a pair of major access roads over a total approximate distance of 126 km in the km 105 sector of the Route de la Baie-James (Route 109) and Lake Quénonisca. COMEX will receive written briefs and/or oral comments from interested parties at the following public hearing:

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2015 at 2:00 PM

Information about the public hearing and the project itself is available at: **www.comexqc.ca/en**

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by Amy German

Stronger than diabetes

Regional conference gets at the root causes of a Cree epidemic

When the first Cree Regional Diabetes Conference was held in 2006, the plan was to make it an annual event, said organizer Janis Neeposh. Unfortunately it would take until 2015 and for the community of Oujé-Bougoumou to pick up the reins to make this happen, resulting in a resounding success according to attendees.

From October 27-29, the community hosted a major three-day event in conjunction with the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay that saw people from all over the region come together to learn about diabetes and the health of Crees.

"Because November is Diabetes Awareness Month, we decided to have it right before to inspire the Eeyou Eenou people to search for accessible information in the communities so that they can participate and encourage their friends to practice healthy routines," said Neeposh.

"I was really grateful that we had our own Cree teams and our Cree Health Board team (on hand) to share their learning and presentations with the people on things like the importance of Cree food, eating well while travelling, shopping smart at the grocery store, and smoking and diabetes."

Neeposh said that at the end of the event, the feedback she got from participants was that they wished the event to have been longer so that people could have attended all of the workshops that were offered.

Reflecting from her own experience, Neeposh said she appreciated seeing people come forward to share personal stories about how they learned to control the disease.

She especially enjoyed learning about how traditional medicine can now play a role in the treatment of diabetes in a presentation by Mistissini's Pat Awashish.

"My main goal for the conference was to inspire people not to give up on themselves as it is time to take our lives back and change our habits if we have to. We really need to improve the balance in our lives so that we can avoid health complications in the future," said Neeposh.

As a Planning, Program and Research Officer in Public Health who has worked on the diabetes file for many years, Sol Awashish said that one goal at this event was to showcase Crees instead of outsiders.

"Most of the speakers were local resource people. I have always thought that we need to use our own people as part of the healing process. In the past, we have had high-profile people come and speak, but then they leave the community and we never see them again. Our people are here year round and they know what is going on in the communities. It makes so much more sense because they actually live in the communities," said Awashish.

"My main goal for the conference was to inspire people not to give up on themselves as it is time to take our lives back and change our habits if we have to. We really need to improve the balance in our lives so that we can avoid health complications in the future."

In his presentation, Awashish said the focus was on working with individual communities to come up with grassroots solutions to work on the diabetes epidemic.

For years the CBHSSJB only provided information on how to eat right and live well through diet and exercise. However, the number of cases of diabetes in Eeyou Istchee continued to grow.

With this in mind, Awashish said that Public Health is working on a new approach to fight diabetes, which is to get the people to come up with their own plan and then have the Health Board facilitate it.

"We are getting back to basics; we want people to tell us what they want and we will do that," said Awashish. "We are asking the communities to set up sub-committees and with this new health committee we will provide the training. In some cases, the training has already been done. Because of the turnover of personnel and people in the communities, every time there is a new leader we have to do another orientation – we are always going back and forth."

Public Health's Paul Linton made a presentation on the latest diabetes numbers for Eeyou Istchee, revealing both good and bad news.

"We now have one in every four Crees who is being diagnosed as diabetic. The tricky thing about this is that if you look at information from the World Health Organization, the Canadian Diabetes Association, the American Diabetes Association and even those in Europe, they all say that for every case that is diagnosed, there is another one that you don't know about and so that puts us up to 50% according to what they are saying," said Linton.

He said that the good news is that the number of cases being diagnosed per year has pretty much stabilized to an average of about 136 annually.

NOTICE (SURVIVOR AND DESCENDENT CLASSES)

To Anyone Who Attended an Indian Residential School or is the Child of Someone Who Did

A Class Action Lawsuit May Affect Your Rights. *A court authorized this notice. You are not being sued.*

- You could be affected by a class action lawsuit involving the Kamloops and Sechelt Indian Residential Schools and additional Indian Residential Schools (the "Schools") (see attached list at Appendix 'A' for the additional Schools).
- A Court has approved the lawsuit as a class action that includes anyone who attended at any Indian Residential School, for any times they attended as a "Day Scholar" (i.e. non-resident student), as well as their children and potentially the bands within communities that contained a Residential School. The Plaintiffs in the class action are suing the Government of Canada ("Canada") claiming that it is responsible for damages arising from attendance at the Schools. Attached to this Notice is a copy of the June 18, 2015 Court Order of Justice Harrington. This Order, and all other decisions related to this lawsuit can also be found on the Federal Court website at:

  www.decisions.fct-cf.gc.ca/fc-cf/en/d/s/index.do?cont=gottfriedson.
- This claim is different from the Residential Schools Class Action Settlement entered into by Canada. In that settlement, only those who lived at an Indian Residential School were compensated for the fact of having gone to the Schools. This claim is for compensation relating to time spent attending, but not living in, the Schools.
- The Court has not decided whether Canada did anything unlawful, and the case is currently planned to go to a trial. There is no money available now and no guarantee there will be. However, your rights are affected, and you have a choice to make now.

YOUR OPTIONS AT THIS STAGE	
Do Nothing	**Stay in this lawsuit. Await the outcome. Share in possible money and benefits. Give up certain rights.** By doing nothing, you keep the possibility of getting money or other benefits that may come from a trial or settlement. But, you give up any rights to sue Canada, or any religious organizations, on your own about the same legal claims in this lawsuit.
Remove Yourself (Opt Out)	**Get out of this lawsuit. Get no money or benefits from it. Keep rights.** If you ask to be removed (opt out) and money or benefits are later awarded, you won't share in that money or benefits. But, you keep any rights to sue Canada, or any religious organization, on your own about the same legal claims in this lawsuit.

- Lawyers must prove the claims against Canada at a trial. If money or benefits are obtained you will be notified about how to ask for a share.
- Your options are explained in this notice. To be removed, you must act by **November 30, 2015.**

QUESTIONS? CALL TOLL-FREE **1-844-558-5538** OR VISIT **WWW.JUSTICEFORDAYSCHOLARS.COM**

Among Eeyouch, rates are higher in women than in men: 29.2% vs. 20.2%. This is the inverse of the rest of Quebec and Canada, where men have a higher diabetes rate than women.

Linton addressed this issue in his presentation, discussing what may be behind these numbers. Rates in women may be higher because of complications during pregnancy, gaining more weight when they take standard tests for diabetes. Men, he said, may be "too chicken to get tested."

"Even when we look at those who go for blood tests, it is almost always women and never men and so in any given month you will have 50 women who will get tested and two men. Why we ask? Where are the other 48 men who should be getting tested? We are trying to make changes. One of them is we are encouraging men to go with their pregnant partners for their gestational diabetes test and do a sugar test at the same time," explained Linton.

The idea behind this is that knowing about your health is the best way to move forward in starting a family. Until the cycle is broken, Eeyou Istchee will continue to have a diabetes problem, Linton said.

"We have to ask the question, is this just genetics? The answer is yes and no. Yes, there is a genetic disposition but most of your lifestyle like what you cook and what you eat and the amount of activity that you do are all things that you have learned from your parents and your grandparents. So, if your parents and grandparents are diabetic and you continue with the same lifestyle and eating habits, chances are you will end up diabetic too!"

AVIS (GROUPES DES SURVIVANTS ET DES DESCENDANTS)

À toute personne ayant fréquenté un pensionnat indien ou étant l'enfant de quelqu'un qui a fréquenté un pensionnat indien

Un recours collectif peut affecter vos droits. *Un tribunal a autorisé cet avis. Vous n'êtes pas poursuivi en justice.*

- Vous pourriez être affecté par une poursuite en recours collectif impliquant les pensionnats indiens de Kamloops et de Sechelt et d'autres pensionnats indiens (les pensionnats) (voir la liste ci-jointe des autres pensionnats à l'Annexe A).
- Un tribunal a autorisé un recours collectif dans cette poursuite pour toute personne ayant fréquenté un pensionnat indien en tant qu'externe, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'élève qui ne vivait pas dans un pensionnat, et également pour leurs enfants et potentiellement les bandes sur les terres desquelles se trouvait un pensionnat. Dans le recours collectif, les demandeurs poursuivent le gouvernement du Canada (le Canada), affirmant qu'il est responsable des préjudices résultant de la fréquentation des pensionnats. Une copie de l'ordonnance du juge Harrington est jointe à cet avis. Cette ordonnance et toutes les autres décisions ayant trait à cette poursuite peuvent être consultées sur le site Web de la Cour fédérale à :

  http://decisions.fct-cf.gc.ca/fc-cf/fr/d/s/index.do?cont=gottfriedson.
- Cette demande est différente de la Convention de règlement relative aux pensionnats indiens signée par le Canada. Dans cette Convention de règlement, seuls ceux et celles qui avaient vécu dans un pensionnat ont reçu une compensation pour avoir fréquenté un pensionnat. Cette demande d'indemnisation couvre les périodes où des élèves fréquentaient un pensionnat, mais où ils ne vivaient pas dans le pensionnat.
- La Cour n'a pas décidé si le Canada a agi de manière illégale, et l'affaire sera jugée plus tard. Aucune somme d'argent n'est disponible maintenant, et il n'y a aucune garantie qu'une somme d'argent sera disponible plus tard. Cependant, vos droits sont affectés, et vous devez faire un choix maintenant.

VOS OPTIONS À CE STADE	
Ne faites rien	**Continuez à faire partie de cette poursuite. Attendez le résultat. Partagez l'argent et les avantages possibles. Renoncez à certains droits.** En ne faisant rien, vous conservez la possibilité de recevoir un montant d'argent ou d'autres avantages qui pourraient découler d'un procès ou d'un règlement. Mais vous renoncez à vos droits de poursuivre vous-même en justice le Canada ou tout organisme religieux sur les mêmes revendications juridiques que celles présentées dans cette action en justice.
Retirez-vous de la poursuite (option de retrait)	**Retirez-vous de cette poursuite. Ne recevez aucun montant d'argent ou avantages qui pourraient en découler. Conservez vos droits.** Si vous demandez à être exclu de la poursuite, et si plus tard un montant d'argent ou certains avantages sont accordés, vous n'aurez pas droit à cet argent ou à ces avantages. Mais vous conservez vos droits de poursuivre vous-même en justice le Canada ou tout organisme religieux sur les mêmes revendications juridiques que celles présentées dans cette action en justice.

- Les avocats doivent prouver les allégations portées contre le Canada au cours d'un procès. Si un montant d'argent ou des avantages en découlent, vous serez informé de la procédure à suivre pour en bénéficier.
- Vos options sont expliquées dans cet avis. Pour vous retirer de la poursuite, vous devez agir avant le **30 novembre 2015**.

QUESTIONS? APPELEZ SANS FRAIS LE **1-844-558-5538** OU CONSULTEZ LE SITE **WWW.JUSTICEFORDAYSCHOLARS.COM**

UNDER THE NORTHERN SKY

What the federal election means for First Nations

by Xavier Kataquapit

Now that he is in power, the big question is what a majority Liberal government headed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will really mean for First Nations across the country. The good news is that out of 18 Indigenous candidates the Liberals put forth, eight won seats. The New Democratic Party elected two Indigenous candidates and the Conservatives, who at one point had four Indigenous MPs, elected none this time around.

Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegrade, Nishnawbe-Aski Nation Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler and Muskegowuk Grand Chief Jonathon Solomon all have expressed a sense of hope about working with the new Liberal government. First Nation political organizations, tribal councils and communities across the country are looking forward to a better relationship. Most have dealt with funding cuts even as the Conservative government directed money to Canada's wealthiest, increased subsidies for big business and fought expensive wars in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The new Liberal government made many promises to Indigenous people. Trudeau committed to an inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women, fixing the infrastructure causing boil water advisories in First Nations communities, adding $2.6 billion to education funding and creating a new era of trust with Indigenous people. First Nations leadership is also looking for substantial housing solutions and efforts to combat teen suicide.

The last time the Liberals held power under Paul Martin, Indigenous, federal and provincial leaders signed on to the Kelowna Accord. The 2005 accord promised a $5 billion investment in Indigenous communities and programs. The accord died when the Conservatives took power in January 2006.

Relations with First Nation leadership deteriorated under the Conservatives. An AFN analysis determined that, in recent years, Aboriginal organizations faced $60 million in cuts. Inuit organizations were hardest hit, with 71% of funding cuts between 2012 and 2015. First Nations organizations saw their overall funding, including core and project-based funding, drop from $69 million to $24 million. Métis organizations suffered 39% in cuts. Non-status Indian organizations were cut 14% and women's organizations were cut 7%.

The Harper government worked to silence First Nations organizations in their advocacy efforts, slashing funding for regional and national bodies by up to 91 per cent.

The Idle No More movement sprung up in reaction to the Conservative assaults, including the removal of protections for forests and waterways.

Bill C-45 eliminated an extensive approval and consultation process before construction of any kind could take place in or around navigable waters. Most waterways would no longer receive the same protection, a shocking development for First Nation people. Many of these waterways still are an important part of their cultural and traditional lives. First Nation leadership expects the Liberal government to fix this legislation so that the Aboriginal people and all Canadians can be sure that our waterways are protected.

Another contentious bill, the Anti-terrorism Act, was passed last June 9. Bill C-51 provides for more power to security agencies and police while reducing the rights of citizens in general. One of the major concerns by rights advocates and First Nation leadership is that those who protest government policy or projects could be considered as terrorists. First Nation people across the country often protest controversial development on traditional lands and waterways. Although the Liberals supported this legislation they did so while promising to revisit it and amend it if elected. First Nation leadership will no doubt be looking for Prime Minister Trudeau to revisit this legislation. Trudeau has the mandate to get the country back on track and now all he has to do is get busy to make that happen.

G. C. C. E. I.

C. N. G.

Resolution 2015-XX:
The plight of Indigenous Women in our communities, provincially and nationally

WHEREAS on October 22nd, 2015 through a television investigative program on the French Canadian Broadcasting Channel a program was aired to examine why the case Sindy Ruperthouse, a Cree beneficiary of Waskaganish who had at one time been a student with the Niskamoon Training and Employment with Hydro-Quebec Program, was another example of a case where the Surete de Quebec (SQ) was making no efforts to find her, adding to the crisis of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women across Canada;

WHEREAS on this same program a number of Algonquin and Cree bravely came forward suffering unmentionable abuses at the hands of SQ Officers in the City of Val d'Or, from intimidation, physical assault, sexual assault and other violations of human integrity contrary to Canadian Criminal and Constitutional law and basic recognized International human rights;

WHEREAS on this program and in subsequent comments and actions taken by the SQ revealed the true extend of the illegal practices utilized by SQ in the north.

WHEREAS all evidence points to the immediate source of these abuses and the condition of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and abusive practices towards Indigenous Women in general, to the systemic racism and discriminatory culture present in public security forces across Canada, including within Indigenous Communities and there is further evidence that the disparity between the human condition between Indigenous communities and Non-Native communities is another source resulting in the victimization of Indigenous Women;

WHEREAS the Cree Nation Government has undertaken a number of measures to address the critical situation, in particular in Val d'Or:

- Made a call to all Cree entities to suspend any activities which result in the congregation of members of the Cree Nation in Val d'Or, including the annual hockey and broom ball tournament;
- Supplied emergency short term funding to ensure that there was private security for the Cree and Algonquin residents of the Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre, to ensure that the exemplary and honorable work of Edith Cloutier in providing a safe place for Indigenous women through the Centre is properly supported and protected;
- Announced that funding would be available to offer a reward and ensure that there are renewed efforts into the case of Sindy Ruperthouse;
- Mandated the Eenou Eeyou Police Commission to address the practices and procedures of the Cree Nation Police Force;
- Joined forces with the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador to call for:
    - o Emergency support measures in the form of social services, operational funding, social housing for the Val d'Or Native Friendship Centre and neighboring Algonquin communities;
    - o The nomination of an Independent Observer to the investigation against 8-10 SQ Officers being carried out by the Montreal Police;
    - o The convocation of Provincial Judicial Inquiry in the treatment of Indigenous People and in particular Indigenous Women in Quebec by Security Forces in Quebec;
    - o The convocation of a high level table with Quebec and First Nations leadership to address the disparity between communities that leads to the victimization of Indigenous women;
    - o The implementation of a National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women.

WHEREAS the leadership of Val d'Or has been characterized by its failure to recognize any restorative role or responsibility for the heinous abuses suffered by Indigenous Women in their City;

WHEREAS the Government of Quebec has undertaken a number of measures and made a number of announcements to address the demands of Cree Nation Government and the AFNQL but has to date refused to commit to the convocation of Provincial Judicial Inquiry that would permit an effective examination of the racist and discriminatory culture which is present in the SQ and other Public Security forces in the province of Quebec;

IT IS RESOLVED THAT the delegates at the Special General Assembly of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)/Cree Nation Government convened on November 3rd, 4th and 5th, 2015 in Chisasibi hereby support all actions taken to date by the Cree Nation Government to address the case of Sindy Ruperthouse, the specific allegations made against SQ Officers from the Val d'Or detachment, the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women across Canada and to address the wellbeing, safety and integrity of all Indigenous women in general;

IT IS RESOLVED THAT the delegates at the Special General Assembly of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)/Cree Nation Government convened on November 3rd, 4th and 5th, 2015 in Chisasibi further mandate the Cree Nation Government to ensure that the important issue of the safety and integrity of Indigenous women remains on the agenda and that specific measures are taken to address the situation within Eeyou Istchee as well;

Carried: November 5th, 2015

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